

The Cover
Bartholomew Mosse
(1712-1759)

Portrait of Bartholomew Mosse, by an unknown artist, in the Board Room of the Rotunda Hospital. Photograph by D. Davison, kindly reproduced by permission of the Rotunda Hospital. The cover is sponsored by Fisons plc.

The Georgian era was the age of the voluntary hospital movement in Dublin. The Charitable Infirmity, founded in 1718, was followed by a large number of hospitals in the eighteenth century many of which still survive — Dr. Steevens' Hospital opened in 1733, Mercer's in 1734, the Hospital for Incurables in 1744, The Rotunda Lying-In Hospital in 1757, the Meath Hospital in 1753, St. Patrick's Hospital in 1757, Cork Street Fever Hospital in 1804 and the Coombe Lying-In Hospital in 1823. These early hospitals were to be followed by many others in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Behind each of these hospitals there is a story of individual and corporate endeavour. Bartholomew Mosse, the founder of the first lying-in hospital in Dublin was a man of remarkable vision and energy. Born in Wexford in 1712, he came to study surgery in Dublin where he qualified in about 1733. After the death of his first wife he travelled as doctor in charge of troops to Minorca and visited many medical centres on the Continent. He became a licentiate in midwifery of the King's and Queen's College of Physicians in 1742, and it was not long before he became aware of the appalling conditions of pregnant women in the city. He wrote: "Their lodgings are generally in cold garrets open to every wind, or in damp cellars subject to floods from excessive rains; themselves destitute of attendance, medicine and often proper food; by which hundreds perish with their little infants, and the community is at once robbed of mother and child". Mosse believed a hospital was needed for these unfortunate women and through the efforts of a committee of friends he acquired a house in George's Lane (now South Great George's Street), and so founded the first Dublin lying-in hospital for poor women. However, he saw this achievement as only a start to a much more ambitious plan. With extraordinary energy and optimism he raised money through lotteries, concerts and entertainments to enable him to purchase in 1748 the land on which he was to erect the Rotunda Hospital. He obtained the services of the famous architect Richard Cassells, and for the chapel ceiling he brought Cramillion over from Italy. The hospital was granted a charter and opened in 1757 with Mosse as the first Master. Unfortunately for the hospital and for Dublin, Mosse died two years later before he could put into effect all his lavish plans.

This portrait in oil of Bartholomew Mosse by an unidentified artist hangs in the board room of the Rotunda Hospital. It shows a vibrant, youthful young man in Georgian regalia and was probably painted when he was abroad. It is perhaps the finest single painting of a doctor in Ireland. It is right and proper that Mosse should be so well represented, as he was without doubt the greatest artistic patron the medical profession in Ireland has ever produced.

(Photograph and details from: *A Portrait of Irish Medicine: An Illustrated History of Medicine in Ireland*. E. O'Brien, A. Crookshank, G. Wolstenholme. Ward River Press, Dublin. 1984)



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